



R-CALF
USA

R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America

P.O. Box 30715
Billings, MT 59107
Phone: 406-252-2516
Fax: 406-252-3176

2100 M Street NW, #170-200
Washington, D.C. 20037
Phone: 202-785-1700
Fax: 202-785-1701

E-mail: r-calfusa@r-calfusa.com • Website: www.r-calfusa.com

DIRECTORS

**President/
Region I**

Leo McDonnell, Jr.
Columbus, Mont.

**Vice President/
Region II**

Kathleen Kelley
Meeker, Colo.

Region III

Herman
Schumacher
Herreid, S.D.

Region IV

Jon Wooster
San Lucas, Calif.

Region V

Chuck Kiker
Beaumont, Texas

Region VI

Max
Thornsberry, DVM
Richland, Mo.

Region VII

Jerry Swartz
Henning, Minn.

Region VIII

Gene Barber
Winchester, Ky.

Region IX

James Fudge
Colquitt, Ga.

Region X

James McCuen
Okanogan, Wash.

C.E.O.

Bill Bullard
Billings, Mont.

December 15, 2005

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

As we enter the New Year, a range of vital issues are on the agenda in 2006 for America's cattle and beef industry, including trade negotiations, health and safety standards for imports and exports of cattle and beef, ongoing efforts to launch a national animal identification system (NAIS), the need to implement country-of-origin labeling for beef, and renewal of the farm bill, among other issues. We recognize the enormous amount of work that lies ahead for USDA on these issues, and know that you, like R-CALF USA, appreciate the vital importance of the cattle and beef sector to the American agricultural economy and rural communities all over this nation, and are striving to find the right policy solutions for America's agriculture community.

We understand that you may soon be putting forward a nominee for the Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs at USDA, who will play a crucial leadership role in these on-going policy debates. The former Under Secretary, William T. Hawks, has a proud record of service, and he leaves behind big boots to fill. We are writing to share our thoughts on factors worth considering in making this important decision.

To help build consensus around policy solutions for the cattle and beef sector, an Under Secretary must be able to balance the needs of producers, processors, and consumers. USDA needs high-level leadership that not only represents the best in technical expertise and experience, but

can bridge the different interests and points of view of the various segments of agriculture. A variety of backgrounds and perspective must be represented. For example, it is important that any nominee be accessible to producers as well as processors, both of which need a voice in policy deliberations at USDA.

Many in producer agriculture, along with government watchdog groups and the media, have expressed concern that such high standards of neutrality, independence and balance are not being met fully. In particular, questions have been raised about over-representation of processors and large agribusiness in USDA appointments, to the exclusion of those with a background reflecting the interests of small and independent producers.¹ In the cattle and beef sector, for example, numerous former representatives of the National Cattleman's Beef Association have been brought in to important USDA posts, while many independent cattle producers feel shut out of USDA decision-making. These perceptions only make it that much harder to bring different segments of agriculture together to find policy solutions that benefit our community as a whole and enjoy broad public support.

R-CALF USA appreciates your consideration of these factors as you move towards filling top positions within USDA. We would be happy to provide input to you on potential nominees for the Under Secretary position that bring expertise, experience, independence and a balanced approach to the many issues affecting America's cattle producers. Once your nominee is announced we hope to be able to express our support. We look forward to working with you on the many issues of mutual concern that lie ahead in the coming year.

Sincerely,



Leo R. McDonnell, Jr.
President, R-CALF USA

¹ See, e.g., Phil Mattera, "USDA Inc.," Report Commissioned by the Agribusiness Accountability Initiative, July 2004.